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dust. Dry leaves kept at hand are then swiftly placed over the spark, and fanned by blowing into a flame. Under favourable and absolutely dry conditions fire can be made by this method in under a minute. But it is hard work, and the European trying for the first time may work for five minutes before getting a flame.

Ritual fires and sex dichotomy. Position of strangers.

There is no family gathering for the meal, however, for one of the fundamental principles underlying society in these islands is that those who have performed the Maki rite, that is to say practically the whole male population, have thereby become so holy that they may not eat with women. This sex dichotomy which decrees that all the men, apart from small boys who have not yet taken their first step in the Maki, must eat separately from women, is one of the most marked features of Small Island society, and has far-reaching results. It is largely bound up with the question of fires, which in themselves, when lit by a member of the Maki hierarchy, are holy. Thus one of the chief acts at the moment of consecration during this rite is the lighting of a new fire, with brands from which (according to one account) the oven on which his meals are henceforth to be cooked must be kindled. Tales dealing with the miraculous origin of certain fires as related on Atchin will be given in a later volume.

One of the results of this sanctity of fires, which affected the writer's entire outlook and conditioned much of his work, was the fact that he himself, not having taken Maki rank, was unsanctified. He was therefore unable to eat with the men, nor could he eat with women, since had he done this he would have been classed as one and therefore automatically debarred from knowledge of men's secret rites. So he was forced to eat alone. This resulted in practically no contact with women, and in the fact that, lacking the ordinary meal-time companionship which in other countries, and indeed among themselves within the sex ban, is the time of greatest sociability, his attention was largely concentrated on the more formal, ritual life of the natives, of which this fire ban is one of the most salient characteristics.

It is therefore not as an honoured guest that the stranger from outside the closed ranks of the Maki hierarchy will be received at meal-time, but as a stranger from a different world, tolerated on account of his personality and his adherence to a race that may indeed be superior in many other ways, but yet one outside the pale of communal eating, to whom it is no insult not to offer food, for the simple reason that it is impossible.

If, thus, it is desired to make a correct approach, meal-times are to be avoided as bringing too obviously to the fore the abyss separating the holy from the unclean who have never, by means of sacrifice, wiped out the stain of having, as boys, eaten with women. There are, it is true,

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stories of men who have acquired such superlatively high Maki rank—there are none living now—that they have been strong enough, not without raising such storms in the community as almost to wreck it, to break the taboo and re-establish, for themselves alone, spiritual contact with the mother's milk by eating from the same fire as women.[1] Such men who have completed the circle between childhood and divinity are regarded with awe and terror as being almost equal to ghosts.

It is well, therefore, to wait until the meal is over, the pipes lighted,[2] and, with the gathering twilight lit up by moon and stars and by the smouldering fire, to approach with some casual appropriate remark and then sit down and listen, not with the head only, but, as the natives say, the "belly," or what we should call the heart.

Debates.

Another type of meeting from which women are excluded but which the circumspect stranger may attend is that of the debates, which in fine weather are held in the dancing-ground or in wet weather in the *ghamal*. These are described by Godefroy [3] as being either "small" debates, which are a kind of communal recreation when a little is said about everything, or "grand" debates, announced by the sounding of gongs. Such "grand" debates are held only on important occasions, when, for example, a woman has eloped or some insult has been perpetrated against one of the influential members of the clan, or else to announce the date of some rite, or because certain old men wish to summon an offender before this the only tribunal that exists.

If held in the dancing-ground, each member of the clan takes his place at the correct spot indicated by his rank. The oldest members take up their position on the Upper Side, close to the gongs; if there are five or six of them, they squat on their heels, in the form of a square; three paces behind, towards the middle of the ground, sit those one rank inferior to that of the old men; yet further off, and separated by the same distance from those superior to them, are a group of young men; finally, that of the older boys. All speak in a low voice, though the elders talk rather more loudly than the rest. They discuss the subject of their meeting.

[1] The story of one such will be told in a later volume on Atchin.

[2] A European innovation, hand-maiden of the trader who, by creating this artificial craving which occupies some of the native's surplus energy now that his work in the gardens has been so notably lightened by the introduction of iron, has established a tobacco-currency which, as the natives themselves despairingly say, "goes up in smoke," and must be eternally renewed, for the white man's profit.

[3] Godefroy, I, 1933, pp. 40-1. The word for these debates in his spelling is *sisilakuarean*, from the verb *sisilakuar*. The Atchin equivalent is the verb *tsil-tsilgwere*, whence on that island I had conferred on me the half-joking title of Melteg-tsilewere on account of my long sessions with informants. (Melteg is one of the titles conferred on men of high rank in the Maki, see pp. 289, 432.)

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pudding placed on those that remain. On this are then replaced the stones that have been removed, and the whole covered in with earth. Here the pudding remains till it is judged to have been cooked. For a large ceremonial pudding on a ritual occasion it may be left in all night or even, for the very largest, as long as twenty-four hours. Whatever time the cooking takes, it is judged always to a nicety, and the resulting food is tender and succulent. We are here concerned, however, only with ordinary occasions, when the pudding is taken out soon after it is put in. Fresh leaves are brought on which to lay it, and the meal is ready. On rainy days it is consumed inside the Lodge. But on fine days—and most days are fine—it is eaten outside, the men squatting on their haunches in usual Small Island style, or perhaps sitting on a handy log. The pudding is sliced with wooden knives and eaten either with the bare hand or taken up with a leaf. When finished, what is left over is kept to be eaten cold next morning, and the cooking-leaves fed to the pigs.

Fellowship with the dead.

All this takes place either within or immediately outside the Lodge, within the Lodge enclosure a few feet from where, lined with stones, lie the graves of the ancestral dead. Much has been written of the fear of the dead in primitive religion, and it is curious that it is this aspect of ancestor cult that has been most emphasised by European writers. As Rivers points out, there appear to exist in Melanesia two diametrically opposed attitudes towards the dead, that of the early inhabitants, which was one of great fear, and that of later immigrants, who believed in their ever-present beneficent influence and so tried in all manner of ways to preserve contact with them.[1] In the Small Islands it is true that in some respects the ancestors are very much to be feared, and that their anger is held to be one of the main causes of disease or even death. But this is only when they have been offended by the neglect of ancestral respect, either on the part of the whole community as a result of the change in kinship regulations whereby the introduction of overt patrilineal descent has deprived the matrilineal ancestors of much of their former prestige, or on the part of individuals who have neglected their private offerings at the ancestral graves, or by the too bold introduction of innovations in mortuary ritual or in some other way have offended particular ghosts. It has already been noted how expiation of the communal sin brought about by the change in kinship regulations is one of the most important factors in the huge sacrifices performed during the ritual of the Maki, but we shall see later that it is through these very sacrifices that the living gain fellowship with the dead by ensuring their own future existence in the land where the dead continue to live. Private offences are similarly expiated by sacrifice or the discontinuance of the practices to

[1] Rivers, 1, vol. II, p. 279.